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ABSTRACT

This study replicated an earlier study that examined the differences between attitudes toward maternal employment among young adult male and female respondents in 1990 and 2000. Responses of undergraduates were obtained in 1990 and 2000 on the Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children (BACMEC) and author-devised items assessing attitudes toward family of origin and the young adults' own career and family plans. Subjects were grouped on the basis of the survey period in order to determine if attitudes had changed over time. Differences in the perceived costs and benefits associated with maternal employment between gender and cohort groups were explored. In addition, the relationship between the respondents' generational cohort and the current quality of their relationships with mothers and fathers were investigated. Between-groups t-tests revealed a significant difference on the BACMEC benefits scale and no statistically significant difference on the BACMEC Cost scale. No significant differences were found on measures of the current relationship between the participant and his or her mother and father. Additionally, no significant differences were found between the 1990 and 2000 groups on items assessing whether participants expect to marry, the age they expect to marry, and the number of children they expect to have. (Contains 32 references.) (Author/GCP)

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CHANGES IN ATTITUDES TOWARD MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PAST DECADE

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2002

Abstract

This study replicated an earlier study by Gorton, Nicodemus, Pomante, Binasiewicz, Dheer, Dugan, Madaras and Chambliss (2001) which examined the differences between attitudes towards maternal employment among young adult male and female respondents in 1990 and 2000. The present investigation included a larger sample, permitting an assessment of the representativeness of the earlier study's findings. Responses of undergraduates were obtained in 1990 and 2000 on the BACMEC and author-devised items assessing attitudes toward family of origin and the young adults' own career and family plans. Subjects were grouped on the basis of the survey period in order to determine if attitudes had changed over time. Differences in the perceived costs and benefits associated with maternal employment between gender and cohort groups were explored. In addition, the relationship between the respondents' generational cohort and the current quality of their relationships with mothers and fathers were investigated.

Directionally adjusted scores were totaled to create summary scores for each participant on both the BACMEC Benefits and Costs scales. Between-groups t-tests revealed a significant difference on the BACMEC Benefits scale and no statistically significant difference on the BACMEC Cost scale. Participants in the 1990 sample perceived fewer benefits associated with maternal employment than those in the 2000 sample (1990: $x=48.80$, s.d.=12.87, $n=333$ versus 2000: $x=50.49$, s.d.=8.60, $n=328$; $t=1.98$, $df=580$, $p<.05$).

Item values were totaled to create scores on the CAS for each participant. Between-group t-test comparisons of the 1990 and the 2000 samples revealed no significant differences on the CAS (Childhood Appraisal Scale).

Directionally adjusted scores were totaled to create summary scores for each participant on measures of the quality of the current relationship between the participant and his/her mother and his/her father. No significant differences were found on these measures. In addition, no significant differences between the 1990 and 2000 groups were found on items assessing whether participants expect to marry, the age they expect to marry, and the number of children they expect to have.

Introduction

In recent decades, women's participation in the workplace has increased dramatically; the rise in the number of employed mothers has been even more striking. United States census data from 1990 indicates that even in 1990, two-paycheck families were common among families with children under the age of 12 months. The rate of maternal employment for two-parent families with children under six years of age has more recently been found to be 62.3% (Johnson, 1997). The steady growth of the maternal employment trend over the last 25 years affords the opportunity to study a population of young adults that have personally experienced the effects of maternal employment in greater numbers than ever before.

For the last two decades, much attention has been given to the increase in maternal employment and its effect on children. Public perception often associates maternal employment with negative effects on children. However, the widespread practice of maternal employment may influence attitudes of today's young adults as well as future generations. While many women work out of economic need, many others work for self-fulfillment. It is important to examine the attitudes of young adults, in order to assess the level of conflict related to maternal employment that they will likely face as they enter adulthood.

Given the increasing participation of women in the workplace, we might presume that expectations about behavior considered to be appropriate for each sex, or gender roles, have undergone parallel transformations (Weiten, 1997). However, Street, Kimmel and Kromrey (1995) obtained evidence that college students' perceptions of gender roles have not changed significantly since the 1970's.

Other research has suggested that young adults do express more liberal attitudes about gender roles than in prior decades. For instance, a study by Loo (1998) assessed attitudes toward women's roles in society. His 1998 sample was compared to a historical sample from 20 years earlier. It was expected that the more recent sample would hold more liberal attitudes toward women's roles than did the historical sample, and that the gender gap between males and females would have decreased. In the early 1970's, Spence and Helmreich (1972) developed a 55-item self-report instrument called the "Attitudes toward Women Scale" (AWS). It was intended to survey the attitudes about the rights and roles of women in six major areas in society: vocational, educational and intellectual roles; the freedom and independence rights of women compared to men in society; the acceptability

of various dating and etiquette behaviors for men and women; the acceptability of drinking, swearing and joke-telling behaviors; the issue of premarital sex; and attitudes toward marital relationships and obligations. The AWS was used for both the historical and current sample. The Loo (1998) study revealed that the attitudes toward women's roles in society have become more liberal. Interestingly, the females reported more liberal views than the males in the current sample. Therefore, the historical gender gap in attitudes is still present to some degree.
In modern society, significant discrepancies exist between traditional gender-role expectations and real life demands. In direct contrast to the gender composition of the current workforce, females are still perceived as primarily responsible for quality of family relationships and domestic tasks (Baber & Allen, 1992).

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For the last two decades, much attention has been given to the increase in maternal employment and the effect on children. Public perception often associates maternal employment with negative effects on children. However, the widespread practice of maternal employment may influence attitudes of today's young adults as well as future generations. While many women work out of economic need, many others work for self-fulfillment. It is important to examine the attitudes of young adults to assess the level of conflict related to maternal employment that they will face as they enter adulthood.

In many ways, maternal employment is shaping the size and structure of the family. A study of Canadian mothers (Rahim, 1993) indicates a relationship between maternal employment and timing of having children. Those women who were employed for a longer period during married lives were found to have smaller families and have longer intervals of birth (Jones, 1975). The probability of having the second child within a two-year period after the first child was 42% for mothers who did not work, 33% for women who worked before marriage, 23% for mothers working only after marriage, and 28% for mothers who have always worked (Jones, 1975).Groat, Workman, & Neal, (1976) found that, in general, the longer a wife has worked, the longer the spacing between marriage and her first child birth, which they concluded demonstrates the mother's attempt to avoid conflicts between job and children.

In contrast to the function and composition of many modern American families, attitudes of parents continue to favor traditional family structures (two parents, working father). If a mother works for economic reasons, she is looked upon more favorably than if she works primarily for self-gratification. Eighty-one-percent of mothers and 67% of fathers say that it is acceptable for mothers to work if they really need the money. However, 47.5% of employed parents strongly or somewhat agree that mothers who do not need to work for economic reasons should not work (Galinsky, 1999).

Ivey and Yakutas (1996) conducted a study to determine whether perceptions of family and family member functioning are a result of the combined and interacting effects of stereotypic gender role expectations, attitudes, and family histories. Traditional patriarchal families were characterized by elevated paternal (relative to maternal) involvement in decision making and diminished paternal involvement in family tasks and childcare. Traditional gender-role attitudes were determined by maternal employment viewed as more costly and less beneficial in terms of effects on child development. Ivey and Yakutas hypothesized that traditional patriarchal family history would relate to critical perceptions of nontraditional, matriarchal families. Family history appears to be related to transmission of role expectations.

Findings from a study on the personal construction of gender roles (Jackson & Tein, 1998) indicated that gender, transition stage (pre/early adolescence and mid/late adolescents), future plan and maternal employment status influenced expectations and concepts of adult roles as mother/father, husband/wife, worker and parent. Further study of the effect of maternal employment on adult role construction is indicated. The importance of this is underscored by the frequency of maternal employment in society today with fewer of families reflecting the traditional two parent model of father as worker and mother as homemaker. A large body of literature supports that children are not adversely affected by maternal employment. However, findings from this study indicate that maternal employment influences personal constructs of adult roles, particularly in adolescent boys.

One study pertained to work and the family of the 1990s. It highlights four themes including: the historical legacy of the maternal employment literature with its focus on children's well-being, work socialization, which is based on the premise that occupational conditions such as autonomy and complexity, shape the values of workers who in turn generalize these lessons off the job. Work stress explores how experiences, of short and long term stress at work make their mark on workers' behavior and well-being off the job, and finally, the multiple roles literature focuses on how individuals balance roles, such as parent, spouse, and worker, and the consequences for health and relationships.

Statistics show that in 1997 the overall employment rate of women was 59.5%, with 63.9% of those women with children under age 6 and 78.3% of those women with children ages 6 to 17. It is also shown that European, African, and Asian American mothers are more likely to be employed than American Indian mothers are (Hayghe, 1997).

In 1999, Harvey (1997) used the latest NLSY data to reanalyze previous findings on maternal employment. She did not find early maternal nor paternal employment status, nor the timing and continuity of maternal employment to be consistent factors in relation to child outcomes. The few notable findings revealed that, for mothers, working more hours in the first 3 years was associated with slightly lower vocabulary scores up through age 9. Children of single mothers appeared to benefit slightly more from maternal

employment during the first year, however, early employment of mothers and fathers was related to more positive child outcomes for low-income families.

When maternal employment is necessary, the next most important factor in the relationship between parents and children is that of the quality of alternative childcare. When the Early ChildCare Research Network examined the effects of nonmaternal care in the first year of life, they did not find any evidence to indicate that there were any detrimental effects (NICHD, 1997a, 1997b). Findings clearly indicated that childcare on its own was unrelated to the quality of mother-infant attachment. When the effects of poor-quality care, unstable care, and more than minimal amounts of care were coupled with insensitive mothering, the results showed that there was a less secure attachment between mother and infant (NICHD, 1997).

Research that has examined maternal job complexity in relation to children's cognitive functioning shows that increases in mothers' job complexity was related to enhanced reading scores for children (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994a). These studies have also shown that mothers who do not have very complex jobs or have jobs of average complexity, find the quality of their home environment decreases over time. Single mothers continuously show the greatest gains from highly complex work settings. Parcel and Menaghan's findings on this issue support the notion that holding a job with little complexity, or entering that type of job, may drain the parents' energy, discourage mothers' intellectual growth, and discourage childrearing values and practices that teach children to internalize norms (Menaghan & Parcel, 1995).

Like job complexity, job stress also has effects on family life. Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale (1999) found that greater pressure associated with work was consistent with the feeling of greater role overload and a feeling of being overwhelmed by multiple commitments. These higher levels of role overload were associated with increased conflict between parents and their adolescent offspring. The image of "overworked" mothers and fathers quickly caught the attention of many journalists and researchers. Hothschiid (1997) holds that for many employees, work has become home, and home has become work. MacDermid and Williams (1997) found similar results when they studied female bank workers. When the workers reported poor supervision on the job, they also reported greater difficulty managing work and family issues, which lead to less nurturing parenting and increased child behavior problems. Repetti and Wood also found in 1997 that when mothers experienced greater workloads or interpersonal stress at work they tended to be more withdrawn from their preschoolers. Larson and Gillman suggest, however, that families temporarily benefit from this social withdrawal. They say this solitary time buffers the transmission of negative emotions from mothers to their children. Repetti (1994) remarks that if they did not respond in this way, or if they are overloaded with negative emotions, it tends to lead to the expression of greater irritability and impatience or more power assertion at home.

Women in the labor force have also benefited families so that they are able to maintain their standard of living. Although traditional ideology of family life has ascribed this role to men, with the standard of living increasing practically everyday, women can not sit

passively watching their husbands go off to work each day wishing they could go too. Research, however, has revealed that these fairly new demands of multiple roles on the women of today's society have the potential to increase stress levels and undermine well-being (O'Neil & Greenberger), as well as to compromise physical health (Repetti, 1993).

The question of how people select their jobs has also been an issue of much examination. Cooksey, Menaghan, and Jekielek (1997) theorize that people tend to select their work on the basis of goals, interests, skills, training, and experience. Mothers with low self-esteem and early histories of delinquent behavior are less likely to attain jobs that are high in complexity. Deutsche (1999) found, parents looking into unsuitable jobs because of time demands, inadequate income, and inflexibility often make bad decisions.

Hyde (1997) also found that mothers with shorter maternity leaves exhibited less positive interactions with their infants if they were either more depressed or who had babies with more difficult temperaments compared with mothers with longer leaves.

As more children experience life with a working mother, personal constructs of adult roles and attitudes towards maternal employment might be expected to change. In order to assess this hypothesis, a comparison of survey responses between a 1990 and 2000 sample was conducted. It was expected that the more recently obtained sample of responses would reflect greater acceptance of maternal employment on the part of both male and female respondents. It was also hypothesized that the perceived costs associated with maternal employment would be seen as lower among members of the 2000 group, based on their greater personal experience with families in which a mother worked outside the home.

Method

Subjects:

The subjects used in this study were 721 college students who were enrolled in introductory psychology courses at Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. The 1990/91 sample consisted of 121 male participants and 227 females, with a total of 348 subjects. The 2000/01sample consisted of 129 males and 244 female participants, with a total of 373 subjects. The subjects ranged in age from 18-28 years of age.

Procedure:

The packet used in this study was handed out to subjects in the introductory psychology class in which they were enrolled. Subjects were asked if they would fill out the packet in its entirety. Ample time was given to the subjects to complete the questionnaire.

The packet used in this study consisted of several measures, including the 24-item BACMEC, which yields two summary scores indicating the participants' perceptions of the benefits and costs associated with maternal employment (Greenberger et al. 1988). The BACMEC measures Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children through items describing both benefits (13 items) and costs (11 items). Studies

of five samples (n=375) have demonstrated that the total BACMEC scale and its subscales are highly reliable and have good convergent, divergent, and concurrent validity (Greenberger et al. 1988).

Next, subjects completed the CAS, the Childhood Appraisal Scale (Chambliss, Owens, & Carr 1991). The CAS is an 18-item questionnaire designed to measure the subject's perception of the consequences of their mother's work status. The subjects were asked to rate each item on a scale from 1 to 4 depending on how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The statements permitted subjects to indicate if they felt their lives would have been different if their mother's work status had been different when they were growing up. This allowed an assessment of the perceived impact of fulltime and parttime maternal employment, as well as unemployment.

Participants also completed items assessing their plans for their own and their future spouse's participation in the workforce after having children (both preferences and expectations), and provided demographic information. including sex and age. Subjects then gave information about their mother's work status at each period of their development. The stages of development and ages of each stage of development were as follows" infancy (birth to 1 1/2 years), preschool (age 2-5), childhood (age 6-12), and adolescence (age 13-15). The subjects were to report whether their mothers worked part-time, full-time or not at all at each of these stages of development.

Subjects were also asked to provide information about their mother's job, indicating whether it was professional, white collar, or blue collar work. The last background information item required the subjects to answer whether or not they had been raised in a single parent household at any time throughout their lives.

Results

Directionally adjusted scores were totaled to create summary scores for each participant on both the BACMEC Benefits and Costs scales. Between-groups t-tests revealed a significant difference on the BACMEC Benefits scale and no statistically significant difference on the BACMEC Cost scale. Participants in the 1990 sample perceived fewer benefits associated with maternal employment than those in the 2000 sample (1990: $x=48.80$, s.d.=12.87, n=333 versus 2000: $x=50.51$, s.d.=8.78, n=373; $t=2.05$, $df=577$, $p<.05$).

Item values were totaled to create scores on the CAS for each participant. Between-group t-test comparisons of the 1990 and the 2000 samples revealed no significant differences on the CAS (Childhood Appraisal Scale). Directionally adjusted scores were totaled to create summary scores for each participant on measures of the quality of the current relationship between the participant and his/her mother and his/her father. No significant differences were found on these measures. In addition, no significant differences between the 1990 and 2000 groups were found on items assessing whether participants expect to marry, the age they expect to marry, and the number of children they expect to have.

At each of the four developmental periods assessed, significantly more 2000/01 participants had employed mothers than 1990/01 participants. While 39% of the 2000/01 sample had employed mothers during their infancy, only 23% of the 1990/91 sample had mothers who had worked during their infancy (Pearson's chi square=20.86, df=2, p<.001). For the preschool period, the comparison was 65% versus 37% (Pearson's chi square =55.62, df=2, p<.001). For the early elementary school period, the comparison was 74% versus 62% (Pearson's chi square=26.06, df=2, p<.01), and during adolescence, the comparison was 87% versus 85% (Pearson's chi square=15.59, df=2, p<.05). No significant differences between the cohorts were found on the Childhood Appraisal Scale, nor on items assessing the quality of relationships with mothers and fathers.

Between-groups t-tests demonstrated no significant difference between the 1990/01 and 2000/01 groups for the age they expected to marry or the number of children they expected to have. In both cohorts, male participants expected to marry at 26 years and female participants expected to marry at 25 years of age. In both samples, respondents expected to have 1 child.

Chi square analyses showed no significant changes from 1990/91 to 2000/01 in the percentages of males or females preferring employment versus non-employment or expecting fulltime versus part-time employment during their children's infancy. However, additional chi square analyses indicated that members of the 2000/01 cohort (males and females combined) were more likely than those in the 1990/91 cohort to prefer working when their youngest child is of preschool (chi square=14.85, df=1, p<.001) or elementary school age (chi square=4.21, df = 1, p<.05).

Chi square analyses revealed significant differences between male and female respondents on the measures of working preferences during children's infancy, preschool years, and adolescence, but not during the elementary school years. Only 14% of the female respondents preferred to work during their child's infancy, while 58% of the males expressed a preference to work. During the preschool years, 49% of the females preferred working, while 72% of the males preferred working. During their children's adolescence, 91% of the females would prefer to work, while only 88% of the males expressed this preference. During the elementary school years, 86% of the males and 87% of the females would prefer to work (chi square=1.12,ns).

Employment Preferences versus Expectations

For both the 1990/91 and 2000/01 samples considered jointly, within-subject t-tests revealed significant differences between preferences and expectations for work during children's infancy, preschool years, elementary, and adolescent school years. During their children's infancy, 59% expect to work but only 30% prefer this (chi square=145.04(1), p<.001. During the preschool years, 83% expect to work and 57% prefer this (chi square=118.27(1), p<.001). During their children's elementary school years, 97% expect to work and 87% prefer this (chi square=49.98(1), p<.001). During infancy, 59% expect to work but 30% would prefer to work; during their children's

preschool years, 83% expect to work but 57% would prefer to. By the time their children are in elementary school, 97% expect to work but 87% would prefer to work, and by adolescence, 90 % expect to work, but 90% prefer to work

Female Participants' Responses

Responses for the female participants were analyzed separately in order to assess changes in their attitudes over the course of a decade. Between-groups t-tests showed no significant difference between the 1990/91 and 2000/01 female samples was found on either the BACMEC costs or benefits scales.

Between 1990/91 and 2000/01 female participants showed significant changes in their working preferences during their child's infancy (Pearson's chi square=3.61, df=1, p<05). For the 1990 sample, most females (82%) said they would prefer not to work when their youngest child was an infant, while for the year 2000 sample, an even greater majority (89%) said they would prefer not to work.

In contrast, once children reach the preschool years, among the 1990/91 sample roughly one-half (58%) preferred not to work, while among the 2000/01 sample just less than one-half (45%) preferred not to work. Among the women assessed in 1990/91, only a minority (15%) did not want to work when their youngest child is six to twelve years old, while among those assessed in 2000/01, 11% did not want to work while their child was in elementary school. Similarly, among the 1990/91 sample, few (7%) preferred not to work when their youngest child is adolescent (13 to 18 years old), and a similarly small percent from the 2000/01 sample (10%) expressed this preference.

Male Participants' Responses

Responses for the male participants were next analyzed separately in order to assess changes in their attitudes over the course of a decade. No significant cohort differences between the 1990/01 and 2000/01 male samples were found on the BACMEC benefits and costs scales. Between group t-tests showed a statistically significant difference in the percent of household income males expect to contribute (t=3.61, df=237, p<.01). Males in the 2000/01 sample expected to contribute 62% (s.d.=14.39) of the household income, while those in the 1990/91 sample expected to contribute 69% (s.d.=15.32). No significant change in preference for spouses' working during children's infancy or preschool years was found when the 1990/91 and 2000/01 male samples were compared using between-groups t-tests. However, significant changes emerged on preferences for spouses' to work during children's elementary school years (t= 5.69 df=198, p<.01, corrected for inequality of variances) and their adolescence (t=2.89, df=191, p<.05). Among those assessed in 1990/91, 68% wanted their spouses to work during their children's elementary school years, while in 2000/01 32% expressed this preference. The majority (84%) in the 1990/91 sample wanted their spouses to work during their children's adolescence, while 17% of those from the 2000/01 preferred this.

Discussion

This study explored the attitudes of maternal employment in the decade of 1990 as compared to the decade of 2000. This study revealed that the attitudes of maternal employment have not changed much from 1990 to 2001. This held true for each category that was surveyed except the BACMEC scale for the benefits associated with maternal employment. The 1990 and 2000 samples reported similar expectations for marrying and becoming parents. The groups were not different in terms of their tendencies to blame their mothers' work status for various problems (despite the fact that significantly more mothers in the 2000 sample had been employed throughout all four developmental periods).

The results of this study challenge the assumption that attitudes of maternal employment are quickly changing. Over the years there has been an ongoing debate about the effects of maternal employment and daycare, and whether it is more beneficial for children to have a mother who stays at home while they are young or for them to enjoy the stimulation offered within a daycare environment. Contrary to assumption that students in 2000, who had significantly more first-hand experience with maternal employment, would express significantly different attitudes about maternal employment than students from 1990, who were far more likely to have mothers who were not employed during their childhoods, few attitudinal differences emerged.

Perceptions about the costs of maternal employment did not change during the course of the decade the effects, although views of the benefits for children did shift. This suggests that there is a growing recognition of the possible advantages associated with the socialization and educational opportunities provided by daycare. Despite this, concerns about the psychological harms of maternal employment seem to be persisting. However, it is interesting that the comparison between the 1990 and 2000 groups showed that those in the 2000 sample (both males and females) reported a greater preference for employment during their children's preschool and elementary school years.

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